

Jacqui Johnson, Senior Early Years Officer

December 2022

KEY POINTS

1. This case study explores the journey of lunch transitioning from the school dining hall into the setting.
2. This case study discusses Airth ELC's Marvellous Mealtimes charter.
3. This case study explores the important life skills our children develop from this approach.

KEY FACTS

- Airth ELC is based within the rural village of Airth. All of the children who attend the setting will transition to Airth Primary School.
- The setting is able to cater for 40 children between the age of three and five.

OUR STORY

In August 2021, we finally welcomed children back through our doors following a turbulent eighteen months. Having started as Senior at Airth in the height of the pandemic this was my first opportunity to see how the lunchtime routine looked within Airth.

Transition from lunch in dining hall to lunch in our setting

It was apparent from the offset that some of our younger children found the experience in the dining hall overwhelming. We had a 30-minute time window for children to eat their two-course lunch before the rest of the school required access to the dining hall. This time constraint resulted in some children not finishing lunch or taking part of their lunch back into the nursery. We decided to make Marvellous Mealtimes a priority in our nursery improvement plan.

Our transition began by purchasing a lovely natural table and bench and a trolley to keep food at temperature. With this in place, we were set to go.

The environment was adapted to create a small homely area with the new table dressed with flowers and interesting provocations to spark conversation and to make it inviting to our children. The relaxing music in the background over lunchtime added to the ambience.

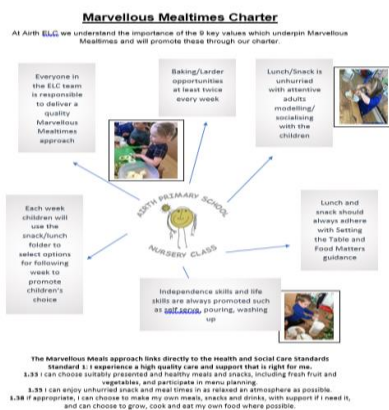
It was immediately apparent that our relaxed, free flow, unhurried lunchtime was nurturing and offering children a quality experience they are worthy of. There were many smiles, lovely discussions and children could take their time and enjoy their food. We shared our approach and vision via a newsletter and the feedback was positive.

“Marvellous Meals looks brilliant and seems like a lovely opportunity for the children to be more independent”
– Parent 12/11/22



Marvellous Mealtimes charter

As a team, we spoke in depth about how our Marvellous Mealtimes approach should look. We considered the nine key values and used these to underpin our own Airth ELC Marvellous Mealtimes Charter. Its purpose was to empower everyone to feel confident in delivering a high quality experience with children at the centre. This allowed a shared understanding of the theory and the benefits to our children. Our charter highlighted the close links to Social Care Standards and Realising the Ambition.



Promoting and developing life skills through Marvellous Mealtimes

Initially the children required adult modelling and support to build the foundation of the new routine and the skills. However, within a few weeks we could see the difference in their independence, fine motor

“I find Marvellous Mealtimes to be a positive, inclusive experience. Giving the children the freedom to choose when and what they would like to eat. Helping to build confidence and independence in a familiar and comfortable environment” – Lisa (Early Years Officer)

We shared this QR with our families to promote and celebrate our approach and share the benefits of Marvellous Mealtimes.



skills and sense of autonomy. Almost all children were making choices over what they would like for lunch, self-serving using utensils, pouring their milk/water and washing their own dishes. Lunchtime became all about an experience for children to socialise with their friends and be supported by nurturing adults. Adults who are on hand to interact and eat with the children to help develop these key life skills and to model and promote positive associations with food.

Baking and cooking within this approach is further developing skills such as cutting, peeling, measuring, weighing and following recipes. We are very proud of our Marvellous Mealtimes journey so far.

REFLECTION

- Transitioning into the nursery for lunches has transformed the experience and children are no longer rushed or unable to finish their meal due to a time constraint.
- The charter brings a sense of pride in what we are delivering, it also allows for accountability. Our children deserve the best experiences and our charter will ensure this.
- Having visuals to help children with the routine of snack, lunch and washing dishes was a useful support to help embed the routine. As a team, we actively use auditing tools to ensure we are getting this approach right for all of our children.

TOP TIPS

- 1) If lunches are taking place within the setting, ensure there is adequate transition to allow the children to become familiar with the dining hall prior to starting Primary One.
- 2) Having a visual representation of whether there is space at snack and lunch makes a difference. It supports our children to visually know immediately if there is space and if snack/lunch is open.
- 3) Do not feel that you have to provide an alternative lunch larder option every day. Particularly if you know the menu item for that day is popular.